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SUBJECT: NAVIGATING SUDAN'S MINEFIELDS

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (U) A May 22-31 visit to Sudan by Col. Stu Harris, Deputy Director for Programs, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs helped address the growing tension among Sudanese officials, local mine action groups and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). The departure of one mine action INGO, the detention of INGO personnel from another group, and increasing complaints from the South Sudan De-Mining Commission (SSDC) against many INGOs has signaled the need for more coordination between the Government of National Unity (GNU), the Government of South Sudan (GoSS), the United Nations (UN), INGOs, and international donors including the United States. This assessment mission provided an opportunity for different parties to air their views and frame an agenda for future action. END SUMMARY.

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BACKGROUND  
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¶2. (U) The Department contributed over USD 2,000,000 to mine action efforts in Sudan in 2006. As the single largest contributor to mine action, the U.S. delivers its funds through the United Nations Mine Action Office (UNMAO) and the UN Development Program (UNDP). This coordinated effort has helped clear over 1,800 km of road from mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), educate over one million individuals about mine and UXO risks, and destroy over 4,000 mines and pieces of UXO in controlled demolitions. Through the GoSS, the Department has also helped support the infrastructure of the GNU's National Mine Action Center and the Juba-based SSDC.

¶3. (U) Less than three years into its existence, the SSDC is just beginning to develop its infrastructure with funding coming from the GoSS, UNDP, UNMAO, and other international donors. Within the last six months, the SSDC has established its headquarters in Juba, developed a regional office in Yei, increased its personnel to 34 full time staff, and purchased eight vehicles for official use. Despite its relative inexperience, SSDC has expressed a strong desire for more control over de-mining efforts in southern Sudan.

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CHALLENGES  
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¶4. (U) While de-mining efforts have largely remained on course in northern Sudan, the fledgling SSDC has struggled to establish itself in the south. After extended miscommunication with the GoSS and the SSDC, one respected INGO, the Halo Trust, decided to close its operations in Sudan in 2007. Another, the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), recently experienced two separate incidents in which its personnel were subjected to harassment. In 2007, the GoSS

temporarily revoked the visa of MAG's Chief of Party after tense negotiations regarding MAG's property and hiring practices. Security officials also detained two MAG personnel after they demolished a serviceable mortar found by schoolchildren. These personnel were detained for approximately six hours and put under house arrest for 17 days. (Note: Under their UN mandate, MAG personnel are entitled to demolish explosive remnants of war, land mines, and UXO. End Note).

15. (U) These incidents also reflect a broader atmosphere of distrust. In a May 25 meeting at the SSDC headquarters in Juba, Col. Harris and PolOff listened to SSDC concerns. SSDC personnel drew sharp distinctions between the efforts of Sudanese mine action organizations and international de-mining groups. They also described a competitive and antagonistic relationship with INGOs. A central SSDC concern is what they believe is a lack of appropriate funding for both the SSDC and local mine action groups. As the SSDC's printed briefing argued, "National [Sudanese] NGOs will carry out mine action more cost effectively and efficiently because their salaries are much lower than their expatriate counterparts, they have less of a 'stand-down period,' and . . . they will immediately remove any landmines/UXOs regardless as to mandates." The SSDC also alleged that INGOs lack transparency, commitment, and motivation apart from financial gain. (Note: Full minutes of briefing have been sent to PM/WRA. End Note.)

16. (U) Separately, representatives from the UNDP, UNMAO, and several INGOs repeatedly expressed a sense of frustration and disappointment with the current state of relations with the SSDC. In assessing this situation, one representative from the UNDP stated, "The SSDC is trying to sprint before it can walk." Another senior UN representative from the Mine Action Office stated, "SSDC just appears to want to mimic the exact structure of the UN Mine Action Office." UN officials added that through cooperation with international advisors, participation in UN-sponsored training programs, and further management experience for senior and mid-level managers, the SSDC should be able to be entirely independent by 2011. Other UN officials emphasized that the SSDC is a very new commission with recently appointed staff. SSDC is also effectively isolated, according to these officials, from the existing the existing national mine action office structure. The UN Mine Action Office of Southern Sudan has been managing the mine action program and training its own indigenous staff. Officials acknowledged that these two parallel structures, UNMAO-SS and the SSDC, may be duplicating efforts.

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WAYS FORWARD  
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17. (U) Aware of these issues prior to his visit, Colonel Harris directly addressed many of these challenges. Envisioning a gradual transition from INGOs and UN leadership to Sudanese NGOs and SSDC control by 2011, Col. Harris urged all parties to adopt a more focused and structured approach to Sudanese capacity development. More institutional capacity can be achieved through further training for SSDC management at the mid and senior levels, internships in the UNMAO and UNDP office, and targeted institutional support for the SSDC. Harris urged representatives from all major mine action players (including the UNMAO, UNDP, the GNU Deputy Secretary of Humanitarian Affairs and SSDC) to improve their communication and to work towards the de-personalization of conflicts. Using the MAG mortar demolition as an example, Harris recommended that important issues such as these be elevated up the chain of command, and ultimately be decided by committees and review boards, as opposed to temperamental individuals. He also recommended that donor embassies and consulates are involved early in the process.

18. (U) Harris and UNDP leadership also explored the idea of strengthening the institution of the SSDC. Relatively simple concrete steps, such as developing an action plan, organizational chart, and a board of overseers, may help the SSDC become a more viable institution. With respect to the parallel structures of the UNMAO-SS and the SSDC and the duplication of their efforts, Harris suggested clearer communication and delegation of tasks. He also proposed that one organization deal with higher level management, while the other handles the day-to-day management of mine action efforts in South Sudan.

¶9. (U) This visit also generated several other ideas for the improvement of de-mining efforts in Sudan. Harris and senior UNDP leadership considered: (a) the development of a database of trained Sudanese de-miners for quick deployment, as was used in Afghanistan; (b) the transformation of some SPLA troops into de-mining units in a pilot project; (c) training for additional medics to be integrated into de-mining teams; (d) the development of a competitive, structured de-mining team leader course; (e) the importance of cultural training for INGOs prior to beginning their work in Sudan; (f) the need for a central, controlled demolition site in Juba.

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SUCSESSES  
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¶10. (U) Despite these challenges, thousands of kilometers of road have been physically cleared and certified safe from UXO and mines. Economic development has flourished along cleared transportation networks. In particular, commodity prices have dropped along cleared railroads and roads. In addition to the increased flow of goods and services, access to health care, education, and government services has increased. Senior UNDP representatives confirmed that the Department of State funds are well administered, and that funding is at the appropriate level.

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COMMENT  
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¶11. (U) Any success or challenge cannot be evaluated outside of the very difficult working environment in South Sudan. Extremely limited telecommunications, hazardous road networks, and major weaknesses in overall infrastructure make seemingly simple tasks logistical challenges. The antagonism between the SSDC and the international actors should not be taken lightly. Nonetheless, this tension may be seen as a natural and perhaps even healthy expression of a young institution's yearning for more autonomy and responsibility. This visit helped address and ameliorate tensions, while underscoring U.S. commitment to de-mining efforts in Sudan.  
END COMMENT.

¶12. (U) This reporting telegram has been cleared by Colonel Harris.

FERNANDEZ